NEWS RELEASE

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Hurricane Sandy activities: Army Corps reservoirs poised to capture expected rain
Engineers: 4 of 10 dam gates at Montgomery Locks "inoperable"
Emergency power teams pre-positioned to East Coast

PITTSBURGH

Corps' regional reservoirs poised to capture Sandy rain

The US Army Corps of Engineers reports that its 16 flood damage reduction reservoirs have flood storage available to capture expected precipitation from the remnants of Hurricane Sandy. The retention of flood waters will reduce the risk of major river flooding. Most Corps reservoirs are near winter storage levels which provide more space to capture seasonal rainfall and snowmelt. When a storm hits, the Corps' headwater reservoirs in the upper Ohio River Basin minimize flooding by capturing precipitation that falls in one third of the district boundaries. The Corps releases that excess water as the rain decreases to regain flood storage capacity for the next storm. Flash flooding along the region's uncontrolled tributaries and streams remains a high risk during times of heavy rainfall.

Four dam gates at Montgomery Locks 'inoperable'

Corps engineers were dispatched today to Montgomery Locks and Dam on the Ohio River near Aliquippa, Pa. to inspect the facility's faulty dam gates. Initial reports state that mechanical and structural components used to lift and lower four of the navigation dam's 10 gates were too severely deteriorated to reliably operate. Engineers will conduct a more in-depth analysis of the gates over the next few days. When storms hit the region, the Corps opens the gates on its navigation dams to allow water to pass through and then lowers the gates after high water subsides to maintain a navigable river depth. The Corps is closely monitoring river conditions and traffic near the Montgomery facility. Heavy flash flooding and a sudden rise in river levels and velocities increase the risk of a barge strike. The severely corroded dam gates could fail if a breakaway barge slams into them. The Corps is preparing plans and considering actions to implement in the event that the dam gates freeze in the up position or suffer a gate failure due to a barge strike. The district's repair fleet has prepositioned maintenance bulkheads at the lock and loaded "gravity blocks" on a barge moored at Neville Island that could be used to seal openings should a gate fail or not lower due to mechanical deterioration. A gate failure at a navigation dam does not present a risk to lives but could diminish the Corps' ability to manage the navigation depth. At worst, a strike that knocks out several gates could initiate a draining of the navigation pool, causing significant economic impact to the river commerce industry and its clients – namely, power plants.

Emergency power teams preposition to East Coast to provide critical power

The Army Corps has deployed power teams to several states along the East Coast that are in the windy path of the approaching Hurricane Sandy. The Corps' Pittsburgh District manages the federal government's national emergency power contract which provides power to critical infrastructure during outages, typically in support of FEMA regions.

Members of the Pittsburgh District's power team have deployed to New York to support FEMA Region II and associated states. Other Corps teams have deployed to Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania to be poised to respond to any states' emergency power needs. Typical facilities include hospitals, shelters, 911 centers, police and fire stations, potable and sewage water plants and lift stations.

Pittsburgh District operates the oldest, largest and most fatigued navigation system in the Corps' national inland waterways inventory. The 26,000 square miles of its upper Ohio River Basin boundaries include portions of western Pennsylvania, northern West Virginia, eastern Ohio, western Maryland, and southwestern New York. The district's jurisdiction includes more than 328 miles of navigable waterways, 23 navigation locks and dams, 16 multi-purpose flood control reservoirs, 42 local flood protection projects and other projects that protect and enhance the nation's water resources, infrastructure and environment.